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ABSTRACT

Students often arrive at universities ill-prepared for the reflective practice needed to derive maximum benefits from a Freshman Seminar. At the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, portfolio projects are semester-long assignments in which the portfolio serves as a capstone activity to help freshmen more thoroughly analyze their first year experiences and more meaningfully integrate them into their overall academic and personal development. Freshman Seminar portfolios contain a selective collection of "best work" developed during a student's first semester at college, chosen by the student to show his or her progress and growth. The portfolio is also a way to build in accountability for quality performance in the seminar. Portfolio entries fall into three categories: those which show evolution and change, those which illustrate accomplishment, and those which encourage integration and application. The model is easily adapted to other types of seminars. For discipline-based seminar courses, the assignments could include a "State of the Discipline" section and a "Future Trends" section. Techniques are offered for avoiding pitfalls in portfolio assignments. Sample evaluation grids are provided. An appendix contains a student handout describing the portfolio assignment. (JDD)

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ED 371 702

Portfolios: A Capstone Activity for Students in Freshmen Seminar

A paper presented to the
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Portfolios: A Capstone Activity for Students in Freshmen Seminar

Session Description

Students often arrive at college ill-prepared for the type of reflective practice needed to derive maximum benefits from a Freshmen Seminar. Portfolio projects can be a capstone activity to help students more thoroughly analyze their first year experiences and more meaningfully integrate them into their overall academic and personal development. Portfolio assignments for different types of Freshmen Seminars will be presented here. Participants will be given sample portfolio prompts and entries from student generated portfolios[1]. Difficulties associated with portfolio assignments will be addressed along with suggestions for handling them. Strategies for portfolio assessment and evaluation will also be discussed.

Abstract

A variety of models exist for Freshmen Seminar courses. So-called "Introduction to the University" seminars familiarize students with a variety of campus facilities and services, encourage students to clarify values and goals, and help them develop strategies to cope with the academic, social, and personal challenges of college life. Other, discipline-based, seminars introduce students to a specific major and the contemporary issues and research methodology associated with it. And issues-oriented Freshmen Seminar classes use course readings and presentations revolving around themes such as war and peace, the environmental challenge, technology, or diversity to facilitate students' intellectual development, social awareness, and emotional maturation.

Although individual curricula differ among Freshmen Seminars, all have similar goals of helping students survive the freshman year, develop a sense of identity within the Academy, and achieve academic success. These goals are more likely to be met when students are equipped to reflect on their freshman year experiences (including those in Freshmen Seminar), analyzing them and then applying lessons learned to other courses and to life outside the classroom. Instructors often assume that these processes are occurring as a natural outgrowth of exposure to the material covered in a Freshmen Seminar; in many instances, this may be a faulty assumption. For one thing, students arrive at the university ill-prepared for the type of reflective practice needed to accomplish this. They view high school and college curricula as a series of independent courses, marginally related to one another or to the "real world." Thus, they have little experience integrating their academic experiences into the fabric of everyday life and have had little practice in applying necessary critical thinking skills to do so. The result is that students may not always derive the benefits afforded by a Freshmen Seminar experience.

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[1] For reasons of confidentiality, student generated portfolio entries used during the actual presentation are not included in this ERIC document. For further information contact the author.

One way to assist students with the process of reflection is through a semester-long portfolio assignment in which the portfolio serves as a capstone activity for Freshmen Seminar. To be sure, the "portfolio" concept is neither new nor particularly innovative. Professionals in fields ranging from advertising to architecture have long recognized the value of pulling together carefully selected samples of work to illustrate the evolution and scope of their skills and talents. More recently, however, portfolio use has extended into less traditional areas of the Academy. Increasingly, for example, faculty members use teaching portfolios to document teaching effectiveness and development (Seldin, 1991). Writing portfolios are used to help students understand the writing process and monitor their evolution as writers over the course of a semester (Gruber, 1992; Harrison, 1991). And at some institutions, a senior portfolio has become the capstone project to encourage students to weave together seemingly unconnected threads of college coursework into an integrated overview of their development within the major (Bruno and Fisher, 1992). In each of these applications, portfolios highlight an individual's best works; more importantly, perhaps, the portfolios provide a place for the individual to analyze the significance of the works and reflect on the process involved in their development. In Freshmen Seminar, portfolios can serve as a capstone activity to help students more thoroughly analyze their first year experiences and more meaningfully integrate them into their overall academic and personal development.

This presentation is designed to introduce portfolios as they relate to Freshmen Seminar courses. Examples of portfolio models will be presented. Participants will be given sample portfolio prompts and entries from student generated portfolios[1]. Some of the difficulties associated with portfolio assignments will be addressed, along with suggestions for handling them. Strategies for portfolio assessment and evaluation will also be discussed. The presentation should be useful to individuals who are currently involved in or are developing Freshmen Seminar programs and classes.

Presentation

Introduction

If you had asked me several years ago to explain something about portfolios -- in other words to define what they are and who uses them. It probably wouldn't have taken me too long to answer. And possibly, I would have defined a portfolio as a highly selective collection of an individual's best work which includes:

1. samples of completed projects
2. examples of projects in progress
3. items illustrating the evolution of the individual's work over time.

and in some instances

4. a prospectus of future projects and plans.

And if you had asked me who kept or assembled portfolios, I would have placed portfolios squarely in the laps of architects or artists, marketing directors or advertising executives.

But over the last decade, portfolio use has extended into other areas -- particularly into the academy. There are writing portfolios. Often, although not exclusively used in introductory English courses, writing portfolios are designed to help students trace their development and evolution as writers over the course of a semester. At some institutions, senior portfolios are used as capstone activities to help students weave together seemingly unconnected threads of their 4 (or 5, or 6) years of college. And one of the fastest growing trends in academia is the movement towards teaching portfolios. These as most of you know are materials assembled by faculty members to document their teaching effectiveness.

But for this presentation, I want to talk about a different use of portfolios -- as a capstone activity for Freshmen Seminar. And I can't really do that without acknowledging that there are a wide variety of Freshmen Seminars. Some are discipline based. They're developed to introduce a student to the work of a discipline such as sociology, history, biology; these types of seminars tend to focus on the current issues in the discipline, on the methodology of the discipline, and on the types of professional opportunities within the discipline.

Still other seminars are issues oriented. Based upon themes such as "Diversity," "War and Peace," or "The Environmental Crisis." These seminars are generally meant to help students face the ambiguity surrounding complex issues, to challenge their previously held beliefs, and to help them critically assess the merits of different viewpoints on an issue.

Far and away, however, the most common types of Freshmen Seminars are those developed to introduce students to the university - the so-called *University 101* seminars. These seminars are designed to help students survive freshman year by familiarizing them with a wide variety of campus facilities and services. They encourage students to clarify values and goals. And they help students develop strategies to cope with the various academic and social challenges of college life. Portfolios are ideal for these courses. And it's with these portfolios that I'd like to start. Towards the end of this presentation I'll show how portfolios can be used in other types of seminars.

Freshmen Seminar Portfolios:
What are they and why use them?

Like other portfolios, Freshmen Seminar portfolios contain a selective collection of "best work." In this case, the best work is the material developed during a student's first semester at college. This work is selected by the student in order to show the student's progress and growth. As such, the items are those which show evolution and change, accomplishment, and integration of the college experience.

Why use a portfolio for Freshmen Seminar? For me, there are two reasons. First, although individual curricula differ among Freshmen Seminars, nearly all have similar goals

of helping students survive the freshman year, develop a sense of identity, mature personally, and achieve academic success. To meet these goals -- students must be equipped to reflect on their freshman year experiences, including those in Freshmen Seminar. They need to be able to analyze these experiences, make connections and then (and this is obviously most important) apply the lessons learned to other courses and to other facets of their lives.

By and large, our freshmen don't have much practice in doing this type of reflection. In testimony to that are the countless numbers of students who don't like their major, but don't go for career counseling; or the individuals who continue to use the same study strategies despite failing course grades. As educators the connections seem obvious. Not so for many freshmen, particularly those who enter college immediately following high school graduation.

The portfolio approach is designed to encourage the kind of reflection that gives freshmen the opportunity to make those crucial connections which are important to academic and personal success.

The second reason for using a portfolio really arises from the academic set-up of the Freshmen Seminar course at UNC Charlotte. Freshmen Seminar at UNC Charlotte is an elective course which carries three academic credits and is graded on an A through F scale. This is advantageous because it gives some academic credibility to the course and, frankly, prevents students from entering the course and then "blowing it off" as an easy pass on their records. In other words, there's some bite behind the bark of Freshmen Seminar.

On the other hand the Freshmen Seminar classes at UNC Charlotte contain many of the elements of a typical University 101 type Freshmen Seminar. We deal with study skills and with values clarification. We talk about academic advising and we introduce students to campus services. We discuss academic integrity and issues of diversity. While these are crucial elements for helping students adjust and succeed, they're not necessarily the types of elements which lend themselves to traditional grading. And they're not necessarily activities which hold students accountable for a quality product.

For example: most of us require journals. As many people do, I use them as places for personal reflection and as a vehicle for establishing a connection with the student. The student hands the journal in, I make comments, the student responds. The journal is a written conversation between instructor and student. And the grading reflects that. Students receive full credit if they turn in the specified number of journal entries at the specified time.

This system builds trust and for some that encourages quality. For others, that's not the case. And quality is an issue for us. While the vast majority of our students are in the upper third of their graduating classes, many come from high schools where they coasted through and standards, frankly, were quite low. By not pressing students on issues of quality we're not really providing them with the survival skills they need for academic success. For me the portfolio was a way to build in accountability for quality performance.

Structuring Freshmen Seminar Portfolios:
Types of Entries

Having dealt with the "what" and "why" of Freshmen Seminar portfolios, let's get more specific and tune into the "how." How can a portfolio assignment be structured? What kind of assignments can be used in a portfolio? Well, I tend to think of portfolio entries as falling into three categories:

1. those which show evolution and change; in other words, "revisiting" entries;
2. those which illustrate accomplishment; so-called "cream of the crop" entries; and
3. those which encourage integration and application, "making connections" entries.

Revisiting Entries

As the name implies, the *revisiting entries* allow a student to go back to an assignment or an event and comment on it in a reflective statement. The assignment doesn't have to be one done for the Freshmen Seminar course, but can be chosen from any course being taken concurrently with the seminar. Thus, the student may choose to submit a draft and final version of a paper submitted to an English composition course. The reflective statement accompanying the paper may address any number of issues:

What were the student's initial reactions to the instructor's comments?
What were the weaknesses of the first draft?
What steps were taken to improve the draft?

Other types of submissions can take the form of the following:

Submission: Two exams taken at different points in the semester.
Reflective Statement: What study strategies were used for the first exam?
How did study strategies change following the first exam?
Did study strategies for this course differ from study strategies for other courses? In what way?

or

Submission: Impressions of the syllabus; one written during the first week of class, the second written towards the end of the semester.
Reflective Statement: Which topics in the course were the most interesting? Why? Were these the topics which you predicted would be interesting? Explain.

Accomplishment Entries

Accomplishment entries allow the student to pick and choose the best work from the materials generated over the semester. These entries allow the student to concentrate on success; not failure. And that's probably important at the end of a semester when freshmen

are stressed and some are facing the difficult reality of grades which are lower than they had anticipated when they first began the semester.

As with revisiting entries, accomplishment entries are accompanied by a reflective statement. In this case, however, the entry focuses on the factors which led the student to choose the entry as an example of "best" work and on the factors which contributed to the successful development of the "best" work. The best work may come from any type of course; that is, it can be a laboratory report, book review, journal entry, pencil sketch, or musical score. And it may take the form of a written piece, a video tape, an audio tape, or a drawing. The point is to allow the students to take the time to identify the elements which contribute to successful completion of a project.

Integration and Application Entries

And finally, *integration and application entries*. These are designed to help students make connections and pull together the various threads of their academic and personal experiences during their first semester. Thus, entries can be designed along these lines:

1. Submission: A reflective statement describing how you've connected learning in one course with learning in another course (e.g., the entry might focus on study strategies, how material in one course applies to another, or where material overlaps).
2. Submission: A reflective statement describing how a course taken this semester is connected to future plans in the major or in a career.
3. Submission: A painting (collage, choreographed dance, musical score) which captures and expresses a theme in one of your academic courses/or in your life at college as it has developed.
   Reflective Statement: Explain how the submission captures/expresses the themes in the course

Obviously you get the idea; dozens of different types of entries can be used.

Structuring Freshmen Seminar Portfolios:
Designing a portfolio assignment for a "University 101" course

So how can these various types of entries be pulled together into an assignment? For "University 101" type seminars what's worked for me is a tripartite approach structured along three dimensions. Namely:

1. an examination of **academic adjustment and success** during the first semester;
2. an examination of **social adjustment and success** during the first semester; and
3. **a look towards future plans and goals.**

These work for me because they're consistent with the overall goals of Freshmen

Seminar as designed at UNC Charlotte. A detailed explanation of the three dimensions is offered in the assignment given to the students within the first week of class (see Appendix A). You'll note that students are given the overall outline of the portfolio. They're presented with guidelines for the individual entries and that suggestions are made about the types of entries which could be gathered for each section of the portfolio.

Frankly, I've wrestled with how directive to be in portfolio assignments. Given my "druthers," I'd prefer the assignment to be very free form; in the best of all possible worlds, I'd like the students to be able to design their own portfolios, to be creative, and to determine what most suitably represents their "best" work. My experience has been, however, that most freshmen need a more structured framework in which to operate. Thus, while I try to encourage students to move beyond the suggestions on the syllabus, I feel comfortable that those students who are stymied have enough solid suggestions for entries that they can assemble a substantial and meaningful portfolio.

I've tried to model a balanced portfolio by suggesting different types of entries for each of the three dimensions. Thus, the **Academic Adjustment and Success** section of the portfolio contains suggestions for entries which can illustrate *evolution and change*, *accomplishment*, and *integration*. *Evolution and change* can be shown through entries such as "Success in writing" and "Success in study skills." A taped interview with an instructor can help demonstrate *accomplishment*. And *integration* of the academic experience can be illustrated with an entry which calls for general reflections on academic performance. The same type of balance can be built into entries illustrating **Social Adjustment and Success** and those used to examine **Future Plans and Goals**.

For **Social Adjustment and Success**:

1. an entry revisiting or expanding a journal entry illustrates *evolution and change*;
2. one which describes an extra-curricular activity illustrates *accomplishment*;
3. a reflection on individual growth, a personal map of campus, or a series of "buddy" photos gives the student the opportunity to *integrate* social experiences over the semester.

For **Future Plans and Goals**:

1. *Evolution and change* can be demonstrated by a résumé of student strengths;
2. *accomplishment* can be illustrated in the description of a short term goal which has been attained;
3. career descriptions or interviews with professionals in the field provide opportunities for *integration*.

Moving Beyond "University 101" Courses:
Designing portfolios for "Discipline-based" and "Issues-Oriented" Seminars.

Although the model I've presented dovetails nicely with a "University 101" class, it's easily adapted to other types of seminars. Within a discipline-based Freshman Seminar, for example, a portfolio can be fashioned to include a section which deals with the state of the

discipline. For this section, a student might be asked to develop entries which explain one or more of the important issues being confronted by the discipline and then to explain why they are important issues. Other entries can be modeled along the following lines:

1. Explore branches of the discipline. Which are most interesting to the student? Which are least interesting? Why?
2. Interview professionals involved in the discipline. What do they enjoy the most? the least? What surprised them/disappointed them about the discipline when they made their transition from student to practitioner/professional? What advice do they have for a student?
3. What are the leading journals in the discipline? How do they differ from one another?

The point of a **State of the Discipline** section is to help students expand their knowledge of a discipline and in doing so, feel more a part of that learning community.

Another section of a discipline-based seminar portfolio might be titled **Future Trends**. Entries accompanying this section might be designed to help students explore the emerging issues, prospects, and opportunities in a particular field. This can be the section which helps students explore future job markets and prospects. This may be the "reality check" which can shape a student's choices during a college career and beyond.

The generic nature of the **State of the Discipline** and **Future Trends** sections makes them easily adapted to just about any discipline-based Freshmen Seminar - and so that's a plus. But discipline-based portfolios, however, can also contain more "customized" entries - entries which are designed to pull specific course content into the portfolio. For example, a portfolio assignment for a Freshman Seminar in sociology or anthropology can draw on a specific reading as seen below:

> Portfolio entry: *Body Rituals of the Nacirema* (Miner, 1956) is an ironic look at the everyday "ritualistic behaviors" surrounding food, cleanliness, and body functions in American culture. Using this paper as a model, choose a group of individuals (e.g., students, politicians, teachers) and be the sociologist who writes a description of the daily habits of the individuals in the group.

Another entry might ask a student to examine a "culture" from both an insider's and outsider's view:

> Assignment: What is your neighborhood's reputation? What is said about your neighborhood by those outside your neighborhood (people living elsewhere, newspapers, television). Document the "reality" of your neighborhood through pictures, interviews, your personal experiences.

This particular entry can be particularly effective at an urban or historically black institution which draws on low-income students. These students often experience the negative

perceptions of outsiders and have little opportunity to reflect on the positive attributes of their community (e.g., the single mother who runs an informal tutoring school for neighborhood kids; or the older couple down the street whose garden yields abundant flowers and vegetables).

Assignments for a seminar in biology might be slanted in another direction. For example:

Assignment: Choose a recent report from the local newspaper of a new breakthrough or discovery in biology. Go to the scientific literature and look up the original article on which the report is based. How do the two compare? Did the newspaper accurately report the findings and their significance? What was omitted from the newspaper? Was anything misleading?

or

Assignment: Support or refute the following statement:

"Science is built up with facts, as a house is with stones. But a collection of facts is no more science than a heap of stones is a house." Henri Poincaré

Customized entries can also be developed for so-called "issues" oriented seminars. A seminar on "War and Peace" might be designed to ask students to grapple with global socio-economic and political issues which shape our attitudes towards armed conflict. Portfolio entries can give students the opportunity to integrate course material along with their personal value system in order to articulate a particular position. One such entry might develop along these lines:

Assignment: It is 1967 and you are an 18 year old college freshman. Write a letter to your best friend or to a parent explaining either:

why you have decided to join the army and serve in Viet Nam
OR
why you've decided to move to Canada to avoid the draft.

Your letter should draw on material covered in this course to clearly articulate your philosophy and reasoning.

Similarly, in a seminar focusing on ethics, students might be asked to do the following as part of their portfolios:

Assignment: Choose a recently publicized case of fraud or misconduct involving professionals involved in your chosen field of study.

a. Who benefited (or had the potential to benefit) from the dishonest act? Why/how?
b. Who suffered losses (or might have suffered losses) from the dishonest act?

Why/how?

c. What are the short term and long term repercussions of the dishonest act to the "community."

The point is, there's lots of flexibility in portfolio assignments. They can be developed and adapted to fit any number of Freshman Seminar courses and more importantly, they can be adapted to fit the needs of the students and the instructor.

Avoiding Pitfalls

While portfolio assignments have the potential to engage students in meaningful ways, they also have the potential to backfire. The good news is that most of the pitfalls are obvious and aren't very hard to avoid. Indeed, many can be avoided with some advance planning. So some words to the wise:

1. It's important to structure the assignment to optimize chances for student success. Obviously, this means that the portfolio should be assigned as early as possible - preferably within the first two or three class periods. Portfolios are complex assignments and long term ones at that. This isn't the time for oral instructions. Instead, a carefully prepared handout about portfolios is in order.

2. In order to facilitate the development of successful portfolios, instructors need to give assignments which will provide the "artifacts" from which entries can emerge. For example, in revisiting entries. It's not helpful to ask students to remember what they thought about the syllabus when they first saw it, or to remember how they felt about leaving home, or to recall what an instructor's comments were on the first draft of a paper. A better strategy would be to make a journal assignment (early in the semester) which asks them to reflect on what they're dreading about a course. Or it might ask them to document their feelings about leaving home, about who they miss and why they miss that person. An instructor might set up "revisiting" possibilities by requiring students to establish a folder for drafts of papers or copies of exams handed back to them. All of these strategies insure that there are some "artifacts," later in the semester, which will help them authentically revisit a situation and construct a portfolio.

3. Build in milestones. Some portfolio items can't be completed until the end of the semester. But progress can be made on others. For example, research into career opportunities can occur throughout the semester. Set up deadlines for students to complete portions of their portfolio assignment.

4. Once milestones are set, build in opportunities for feedback, either from you as the instructor or (and this may be even more important) from other students. Probably the easiest, and least invasive way, is to have students work with others on developing career information entries or in sharing their formulae for academic success.

5. Clearly establish evaluation criteria and techniques. This can be one of the trickiest parts of portfolio assignments. How do you actually evaluate them and how do you communicate your criteria for evaluation to students?

The evaluation question was a big one for me. In "real life" I'm a faculty member in a biology department. Not surprisingly, the part of me that is used to grading the "facts" on an exam was somewhat uncomfortable with the evaluation of a portfolio; clearly, we're not looking for "right" or "wrong" answers and yet, I was uneasy about looking at the overall *gestalt* of a portfolio. A *gestalt* type of evaluation is also difficult to explain to students. It's hard for them to understand how to prepare a portfolio when they don't fully understand the criteria for evaluating the portfolio. My most recent attempts to address this have included experiments with an "evaluation grid."

This certainly isn't an original idea, and it's not difficult to implement; basically, it takes some advance planning. Primarily the planning involves determining the essential elements which the instructor expects to find within each entry. For example, in the case of a student who uses two exams to demonstrate academic improvement, essential elements could include (see Table 1):

- the student's analysis of his/her original academic difficulty (i.e., why the student performed poorly on the first exam);
- an explanation of study strategies employed by the student to improve academic performance;
- demonstrated improvement in exam scores (apparently, not an obvious point to one student who handed in two exams, one which received a 78 and a second receiving an 80)
- a reflective essay in which there has been proper attention to "writing mechanics."

A similar set of essential elements for a "career description" entry is outlined in Table 2.

Once the essential elements have been identified, the instructor's first task is to determine whether the elements are present in the entry. The second task is to evaluate how successfully the student has addressed or presented these elements (that is, what is the level of accomplishment?) (see Tables 1 and 2). One way to quantify the evaluation is to assign a numeric score to each level of accomplishment. The overall score on the entry is determined by adding up the scores for each of the criteria and then comparing that, as a percentage, to the total number of possible points. The same process is extended to determine the grade on the portfolio as a whole.

Clearly, this isn't the only way to quantify a portfolio, there are certainly many variations on this theme. And an evaluation grid certainly doesn't eliminate subjective analysis of the portfolio. After all, subjectivity is a part and parcel of nearly any evaluation scheme which requires the instructor to judge the level at which a student has fulfilled goals or exceeded expectations. But the grid does provide some standards for evaluation which not only can be used by the instructor but can be shared with the student as well.

Table 1
University 101 Portfolio: Evaluation Grid
Entry: Comparing Exams - Improvement in Academic Performance

	Level of Accomplishment				
	none (0)	below average (+1)	average (+2)	above average (+3)	well above average (+4)
essential elements:					
- defines problem					
- articulates good study practice					
- improves exam scores					
- shows self awareness					
- attends to writing mechanics					

Maximum number of points = 20 # of points earned =

Table 2
University 101 Portfolio: Evaluation Grid
Entry: Career Description

	Level of Accomplishment				
	none (0)	below average (+1)	average (+2)	above average (+3)	well above average (+4)
essential elements:					
- articulates required skills/qualifications					
- describes employment outlook					
- articulates work of the profession.					
- uses appropriate resources					
- attends to writing mechanics					

Maximum # of points = 20 # of points earned =

Final Thoughts

Portfolios have tremendous potential as capstone activities in freshmen seminar courses. As faculty, we often complain that students don't "put the material together," that students don't seem to make significant connections between information presented at various stages in a semester (let alone over the course of an academic career). We become frustrated by their inability to see individual courses within a broader context. And we're surprised by their seeming naivete concerning their academic shortcomings; students often don't understand why they're failing or the steps they need to take in order to turn the corner academically and become successful.

And yet, should we be surprised? After all, what do we do to encourage the type of long-term reflective practice which would help students be more successful at "putting it together?" For many of us, it seems, these efforts are limited to the administration of a comprehensive final exam - an exercise which usually encourages "cramming" rather than reflection.

A portfolio in Freshmen Seminar, can be an ideal assignment to help encourage students to engage in conscious self-reflective practice. The portfolio exercise, early in an academic career, may start an on-going practice of self reflection lasting beyond the Freshmen Seminar classroom. By asking students to engage in this type of reflection we encourage them to become sophisticated thinkers and learners and thus, promote some of the skills essential for academic success.

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Appendix A
Freshman Seminar Portfolio Assignment
(University 101 Model)

The "capstone" activity for this course is a Freshman Seminar Portfolio. The portfolio is designed to allow you to reflect on your academic and personal experiences during your first semester in college. It provides you with an opportunity to highlight your accomplishments and to explore the progress you've made. It is also designed to help you look towards the future, by exploring the opportunities available to you in a particular major or career. The portfolio is consistent with the Freshman Seminar goals of introducing you to university life and helping you to adjust and succeed in a new academic setting. My hope is that the portfolio will be a useful way to integrate the many-faceted experiences of your life as a freshman.

Freshman Seminar Portfolio
(25% of your grade)

The Portfolio will contain the following sections:

A. The semester in review - Academic

This is an opportunity to reflect on your activities this past semester. The successes you've enjoyed, the changes you have made, the academic insights you've had. You should have a minimum of 3 entries (and no more than 5 entries) in this section. Entries might focus on the following (among other things):

a. Success in writing (submission = a draft and final version of a paper handed in to another course). This should be accompanied by your explanation of the evolution of the paper (e.g. what the weaknesses were of your first draft, the steps you took to improve your paper, how you felt when you first read your instructor's comments, what you learned etc.).

b. Success in study skills improvement (submission = two exams from another course -- perhaps an exam taken at the beginning of the semester and one taken later). This could be accompanied by an explanation of the changes you made in your study habits for this particular course which might have resulted in improved performance.

c. General reflections on academic performance: (Submission = a one to two page essay). This could include your perceptions of the differences between high school and college, the approaches you take to studying, the pitfalls you've encountered, the realistic strategies you have for improvement next semester.

d. A taped interview with an instructor from another class who knows your work and is willing to comment on what he or she sees as your strengths and weaknesses. Your

success here will be determined by the types of questions you ask and by the summary you provide. For this type of submission you might include your perspective on the interview (were you surprised by anything the instructor said? did his/her comments seem to be accurate -- why or why not? how does your analysis differ? etc.)

B. The Semester in Review: Social Success and Adjustment

Your entrance into college signals the beginning of a new stage in your life. You're beginning to leave your adolescence and you're starting to approach "adulthood" and the "real world." A critical part of your college experience will be the personal growth and change which you experience over the next four years. This section of your portfolio will give you the opportunity to reflect on some of the changes occurring during your first semester. Submit a minimum of 3 (a maximum of 5) entries for this sections. Some possible entries:

a. describe an extra curricular activity you've participated in this semester. Explain why you chose it. What has been satisfying about the activity and what have you gained from participating? What has been disappointing? (1-2 typed pages)

b. revisit a journal entry -- comparing your feelings/ideas at the time you wrote the entry with the feelings/ideas you now have. What has changed? Why? What have you learned?

c. expand a journal entry.

d. reflect on your growth as an individual over the semester. How have your relationships changed (with family or friends). What are the positive sides of these changes? The negative sides?

e. Draw (or diagram) your own personal map of UNCC. I'm not suggesting an "accurate" map of the campus. Trace the paths you take routinely (to class, social activities, friends, meals etc.), show the buildings you frequent, highlight the areas which have become your familiar and personal "turf." (Drawing expertise is not necessary) Keep in mind -- this is not a "generic" map of UNCC - it's your personal map.

f. Submit a photo of your closest school buddies. Explain who's in the photo, the qualities each person has which are important to you, and what you contribute to the friendship.

C. Looking Ahead (You must submit the following as part of your portfolio)

a. Strengths: A "resume" of the of the specific abilities, skills and qualities you

possess. This should be based, at least in part, on the information acquired by taking the Myers-Briggs Inventory.

b. Short Term Goal Attainment: Identification of a short-term goal you have selected for yourself this year and a discussion of how you are progressing in accomplishing this goal. Provide an honest assessment and be sure to relate this to your long term goals.

c. Career (or Major) Choices: A description of a possible career (or major), including the skills and qualifications required and the employment outlook for this career or major. This will involve the use of materials you will become acquainted with in our sessions on career planning.

d. An interview with someone involved in the career (or perhaps a professor in your chosen major) who could discuss some of the following with you: what do you like the most about the profession (major)? what do you like least? what are the biggest challenges? what do you see as the future outlook for this profession (major)? what changes do you anticipate occurring in the future in your profession (major)? What advice would you give to a newcomer? (feel free to add any other questions)